

Comparison of Older Adults with Serious Mental Illness with Older Adults in the General Population

This report provides information about the prevalence of certain demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, and living arrangement) among older adults with serious mental illness (SMI) in California and among older adults in the general population. Data in the tables were obtained from a variety of sources* and are intended to provide a limited baseline for interpreting results from a pilot study involving older adults with SMI.

Pilot results are based on data from eight volunteer California counties and describe 856 mental health clients diagnosed as seriously mentally ill. The comparison data include material from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)¹, the Center for Disease Control (CDC)², two California statewide databases (CDS and CSI)^{3a,b}, three relevant articles/reports^{4,5,6}, and the United States Census Bureau⁷. The age groups covered by these various sources are similar, but not identical to those included in the older adult pilot. Most nationwide sources used age 65 as the cutoff for “older adult”^{1,2,5,6}, while the pilot used age 60 as the cutoff. The CDS database extract^{3a} was created to include only age 60+, and a subset 65+ was also analyzed. The CSI database^{3b} contains all ages, including children and youth. Where possible, pilot data are presented using the complete file (n=856) as well as the subset of clients age 65+ (n=546). Since not all sources provided information on the same variables or the same categories within variables, some categories were collapsed or re-categorized to make rough comparisons possible.

Note: Results from these various sources should be compared cautiously. Pilot participants are a small subset of all persons who are seriously mentally ill, and the mentally ill are a small subset of the general population. Additionally, pilot participants were not randomly selected, although the study encouraged the inclusion of a representative sample of clients from the diversity of California’s ethnic groups, diagnostic categories, and the oldest age groups. Nationwide data describing persons diagnosed as seriously mentally ill could not be located.

Older Adults as a Percent of the Population

- Nationwide, the older adult population age 65+ represents approximately 12.7% of the general population.^{1,4,5,7} Percentages vary by state. In California, older adults comprise approximately 11.1% of the general population.^{1,4} The older adult population is predicted to continue to grow significantly in the future.^{1,2,5}
- Estimates of the prevalence of mental illness vary depending on the restrictiveness of the definition of mental illness, but generally range from 1% to 22%^{4,8}. The definition used for California’s performance outcome target population is very restrictive.
- Based on the results of a 1994 study of California’s target population, the prevalence rate for seriously mentally ill older adults age 65+ is approximately 1.6%.⁴
- A recent statewide report indicates that approximately 5% of the seriously mentally ill clients served by the California Department of Mental Health are age 60+ and 3% are 65+.^{3b}

* See the numbered reference list (page 5) for the specific sources of these data.

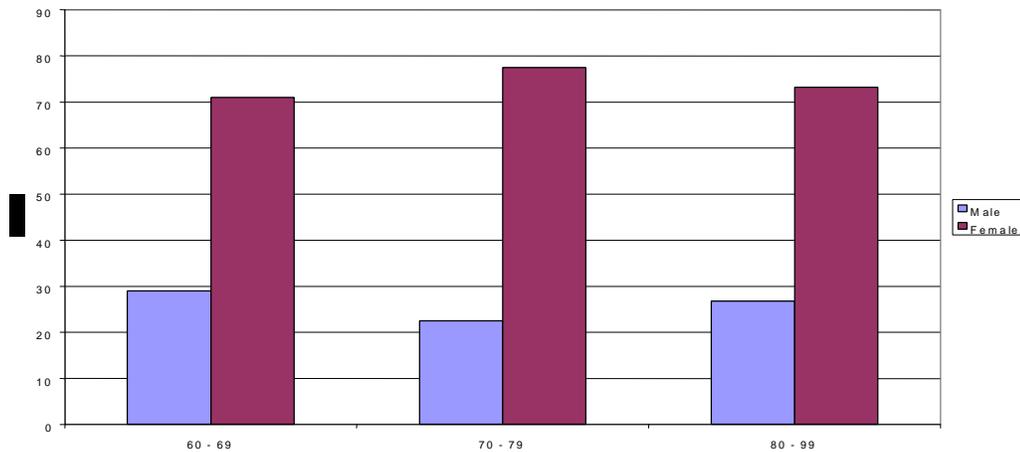
Gender

Percent of Population by Gender*

	Male	Female
Nationwide: General Population (GP) age 65+ ¹	41.3	58.7
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ²	40.5	59.5
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ⁵	42.0	58.0
California: GP age 65+ ²	41.2	58.8
California: Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) 65+ ⁴	43.0	57.0
California: SMI age 60+ ^{3a}	31.4	68.6
California: SMI age 65+ ^{3a}	29.5	70.5
California: SMI age 60+ (Pilot data)	26.8	73.2
California: SMI age 65+ (Pilot data)	25.0	75.0

Discussion. Estimates of gender proportions for adults 65+ in the general population (GP) are quite consistent. All sources found that there were more older women than older men and that the proportion of females becomes higher as age increased.^{1,4,5} Gender proportions vary among the states with numbers impacted by the proportion of older adults and young people migrating in or out, as well as the state's mortality rates.⁵ California results for clients with SMI follow the same pattern, but the differences in gender proportions are more pronounced. Pilot participants had a much higher proportion of females than was true in the general population, particularly when comparing the same age group (65+). Approximately 75% of the pilot participants 65+ were female, compared to approximately 59% of the general population in California. The pilot also found that the proportion of females increased as age category increased when grouped by age category, except for the very oldest group (80+) which may be explained by selection bias and small numbers.

Pilot Results - Gender Proportions by Age Category



Race/Ethnicity

Percent of Population by Ethnicity

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ¹	84.3	8.0	5.1	2.6
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ²	89.8	3.1	3.1	1.1
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ⁵	84.0	8.0	6.0	2.0
California: GP age 65+ ²	74.6	6.7	6.7	6.2
California: SMI age 60+ (Pilot data)	70.0	7.2	12.2	9.9
SMI age 65+ (Pilot data)	73.1	6.9	12.4	7.6

Discussion. Generally, only four ethnic categories were reported nationwide for older adults – White, Black, Hispanic, and Other. The nationwide data for ethnicity are relatively consistent for the “White” category, but there are some discrepancies for other ethnic groups. Most sources predicted that ethnic minority populations would grow rapidly over the next decades, with the Hispanic older adult population expected to grow the fastest.^{1,5} As the older adult population grows it will become more diverse, reflecting demographic changes over the past century.⁵ Pilot percentages for the ethnicity of persons with SMI are relatively consistent with California general population statewide estimates, except for Hispanic.

Marital Status

Percent of Population by Marital Status

	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Never Married	Other
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ²	57.5	31.7	6.6	2.7	0.9
California: GP age 65+ ²	55.5	27.0	10.2	3.6	3.0
California: SMI age 60+ (Pilot data)	14.4	26.2	35.8	17.7	5.9
SMI age 65+ (Pilot data)	13.3	33.6	30.8	16.2	6.1

Discussion. Marital status can strongly affect a person’s emotional and economic well-being by influencing living arrangements and the availability of caregivers for those with an illness or disability.⁵ Sources found both gender and ethnic differences in marital status for the general population. Older men were more likely to be married than were older women (75% versus 43%).^{1,5} Older women were more like to be widows, probably due to a combination of factors (i.e., sex differences in life expectancy, women tend to marry men older than they are, and the higher remarriage rate of older men.^{1,5}). Sources did not specify the ethnic differences, other than to state they existed. The pilot found that Whites and Blacks had the highest percentage divorced and that Hispanics and Asians had the highest percentage married. One source reported a relatively low rate of marriage among the seriously mentally ill (especially for those diagnosed with schizophrenia).⁶ The pilot also found this to be true.

Education

Percent of Population - Education

	LT HS (1-11 yrs)	HS/GED (12 yrs)	HS+ (13-15 yrs)	College+ (16 – 20 yrs)
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ²	22.7	35.5	20.3	19.8
California: GP age 65+ ²	22.4	26.6	28.6	22.4
California: SMI age 60+ ^{3a}	31.8	25.1	11.5	8.4
SMI age 65+ ^{3a}	32.7	24.1	9.5	7.5
California: SMI age 60+ (Pilot data)	36.5	33.0	21.2	9.3
SMI age 65+ (Pilot data)	38.4	34.3	17.2	10.1

Discussion. There is a noticeable difference between the highest educational level achieved for the general population and for clients diagnosed with SMI in California. Although various sources have found that the education level of older adults is increasing,^{1,5} there appears to be little difference in years of education between California clients age 60+ and those age 65+. Although the pilot did not find statistically significant differences in the mean or median years of education by gender or by ethnicity, other nationwide reports describing the general population have found that completion of high school did vary by ethnicity.¹

Living Arrangement

Percent of Population – Living Arrangement

	Independent Living- Alone	Independent Living- With Others	Other: Institution, Care Facility, Hospital, Supported Housing, Homeless, etc.
Nationwide: GP age 65+ ¹	31	?	?
California: GP age 65+ ⁴	25	?	?
California: SMI age 60+ ^{3a}	30.6	41.7	27.7
SMI age 65+ ^{3a}	32.1	35.3	32.6
California: SMI age 60+ (Pilot data)	31.9	27.9	40.3
SMI age 65+ (Pilot data)	31.4	23.7	44.9

Discussion. Except for the “Live Alone” category, general population living arrangement proportions are questionable since different sources reported results in quite different categories. The percent of the population living alone, both nationwide and in California, is relatively consistent (approximately 31%). In general, the proportion of older adults living in a family setting decreases with age; and the proportion living in a nursing home increases with age.¹ Some sources found that living arrangements vary by gender and race (e.g. older adult women are more likely to live alone than older men⁵); however the pilot did not find any statistically significant gender or ethnic differences (although it did find that the Asian groups were less likely to live alone).

Sources of Information

1. AARP Research (November 1999). A Profile of Older Americans 1999. (Based on data compiled by the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services).
Web Site: <http://research.aarp.org/general/profile99.html>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1998. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.
Web Site: <http://www2.cdc.gov/nccdphp/brfss/index.asp>
- 3a. Client Data System (CDS) data file for 1997-1998. Seriously mentally ill clients served by California county mental health systems, selected for ages 60+.
- 3b. Client and Service Information (CSI) Report, for fiscal year 1998-1999. Unduplicated count of clients served by age, gender, race/ethnicity and primary language by month of service for all modes of service.
4. Meinhardt, K, Cablas, A, Jerrell, J, Jay, D, DiCamillo, M, January 1994. The California Household Mental Health Survey of 1992. Funded by the California Health and Welfare Agency, Department of Mental Health.
5. Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being. Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics (last modified 8/9/00).
Web Site: <http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2000/population.html>
6. Robins, L; Locke, B; Regier, D (1991). Chapter 13 – An Overview of Psychiatric Disorders in America. In L. N. Robins & D. A. Regier (Eds) Psychiatric Disorders in America: The Epidemiologic Catchment Study (pp. 328-366). New York: Free Press.
7. U.S. Census Bureau, USA Statistics in Brief – Population and Vital Statistics (last revised 8/2/00).
Web Site: <http://www.census.gov>
8. Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General – Chapter 2
Web Site: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/Library/MentalHealth/Chapter2>